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Statement submitted by World Youth Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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Statement*

A person-centred approach to meeting the Millennium Development Goals

The World Youth Alliance joins the international community in working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. It is critical, if the world is to collaborate successfully in realizing these goals, to examine the Goals in light of population trends in both developed and developing nations. We emphasize especially that the human person must be at the centre of every programme that seeks to alleviate poverty, hunger and disease.¹

Population growth or decline, and its effect on the economic and social dynamics of individual countries, is an important theme in the discussion on international development. What effect does the growth or decline of population have on a society? Should leaders and policymakers seek to decrease population or fertility in order to foster economic growth? These are questions that need to be answered in light of the reality of the dignity of the human person, if we are to correctly identify resources and direct them to programmes that most benefit people in need. The World Youth Alliance takes as its starting point the conviction that human beings are the world's greatest resource and that human creativity is a natural catalyst for development.²

Population policies applied to the Millennium Development Goals

The dignity of the human person offers clear criteria for identifying development policies that will lead to the success of the Millennium Development Goals. Policies must first recognize the great potential of the human person to be a wealth creator, not just a consumer. Human creativity and hard work have driven infrastructure, technology development, and innovation, bringing more food and resources to more people.³ Policies should focus on creating conditions for human flourishing by prioritizing basic health care, education and vocational training, governance structures that encourage domestic and foreign investment in business, and investment in infrastructure that will give people access to services and markets. Policies that distract from this make persons an obstacle to development rather than its object.

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Poverty and hunger are prevalent on a large scale in developing countries. The goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger can be accomplished if communities are empowered to work in solidarity with one another and to optimize resource use. In the developing world, the family and extended family are unmatched in providing shelter, food, care and education to its members, often in

* Issued without formal editing.

¹ Principle 3 of the ICPD Programme of Action ("the human person is the central subject of development").

² World Youth Alliance Declaration on Development; principle 2 of the ICPD Programme of Action.

³ See generally, Sachs, Jeffrey D., *The End of Poverty*, Penguin, New York: 2005, page 41.

very difficult circumstances. Any policy that aims at reducing the prevalence of hunger and poverty must be oriented around strengthening and protecting families.⁴

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

There have been substantial gains in achieving the goal of universal primary education. Enrolment is growing in the developing world, although poverty and disease still prevent many children from attending school. Meeting the nutritional and basic health needs of children is critical not only to their attendance but to their performance in school. An added challenge in many countries, particularly in rural areas, is the training and remuneration of teachers who often work without pay over long periods or opt not to present themselves. These key obstacles to education must be addressed.

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

In many countries of the world, women are denied their civil rights and opportunities for fulfilment of their talents and aspirations. This is incompatible with lasting development, which will be achieved only where women and men live and work together in mutual respect and solidarity. Facilitating equal access of girls and women to health care, nutrition and education is the first step towards gender equality. It is also critical that the international community address policies, especially work policies, that limit the ability of women to decide for themselves how best to balance their formal and informal commitments. Failure to do this may force women to reduce their fertility even when this is undesired.

Many lessons can be drawn from the demographic crisis that Europe is currently experiencing. Not a single member State of the European Union is currently at the level of 2.1 children per woman needed to replace the population.⁵ Indeed, social policy in the European Union is now focused on how to increase the population in order to keep economic, social and political stability.⁶ The reduction of fertility levels is leading to a depleted workforce, an ageing population and, ultimately, instability and decreasing economic growth.⁷ This state of affairs represents particular risks to women who will represent the majority of any ageing population and will find themselves targets for end-of-life policies, which in Europe

⁴ ICPD Programme of Action, principles 9 and 11, action 5.9 ("Governments should formulate family-sensitive policies in the field of housing, work, health, social security and education in order to create an environment supportive of the family").

⁵ See generally the 2008 European Demographic Report.

⁶ The Second Annual European Demography Forum at the European Commission on November 24th and 25th, 2008; see European Demographic Report 2007, Executive Summary.

⁷ Joaquin Almunia, Commissioner of the European Union, Closing Address to the Second European Demography Forum, November 25th, 2008 ("The economic impact of ageing will make it more difficult to finance our Social Model and to sustain it for future generations...the impact of ageing in the EU will, from 2040 onwards, almost halve the average growth rate of about 2 ½% in recent years"); European Demographic Report 2007, Executive Summary, page 6 ("Demographic change will gradually limit the scope for future employment growth").

⁷ ("Projections show that, as employment decreases and productivity becomes the only source of future economic growth, the annual average potential GDP growth rate in the EU-25 will decline from 2.4 per cent in the period 2004-2010 to only 1.2 per cent in the period 2031-2050").

are already marked by a trend towards euthanasia.⁸ Policies should focus on giving more opportunities to women so they can choose their own paths in both the formal and informal workplace.

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

The problem of child mortality can be addressed through strengthening the health-care system, supporting families, and building communities. Access to basic health care for both mothers and their children is a major determinant of child mortality levels.⁹ When policies divert resources from ensuring access to basic health care to programmes that focus on reducing fertility, the real needs of women and children cannot be met. Human creativity is needed to determine the best way to guarantee access to basic health-care services, which will ensure that child mortality decreases.

Goal 5: Improve maternal health

As with the goal of reducing child mortality, the focus of any programme to improve maternal health should be on prenatal, post-natal and emergency obstetric care for women.¹⁰ It is too often the case that women, particularly in the developing world, have greater access to services to prevent and terminate their pregnancies than to protect their health during pregnancy and delivery.¹¹ Such a state of affairs is profoundly disrespectful to these women and is unacceptable.

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

The keys to reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS are information and education, employment opportunities, healthy lifestyles, access to testing and treatment and prevention of mother-to-child transmission. In order to counter poverty, one of the main factors in the spread of HIV/AIDS, it is necessary to build infrastructure, create jobs, provide palliative care and offer opportunities for people to use their creativity in government and civil society positions.

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability

We place great value on our natural environment as a source of both physical sustenance and immeasurable beauty to be cared for with wisdom and temperance.¹² Meeting the basic needs of human beings for shelter, energy, water, sanitation and food in a timely manner is crucial to preventing and reversing much of the environmental degradation we see today; any environmental crisis is connected to a human crisis. Human creativity is the driver behind policies that will sustain the environment for future generations. New ideas about how to channel energy and

⁸ The Netherlands and Belgium have legalized euthanasia. In Switzerland, assisted suicide is legal. In the Netherlands, 25 per cent of doctors have admitted to terminating their patients' lives without an overt request.

⁹ A World Fit for Children Plan of Action, paragraphs 35 and 36.

¹⁰ A World Fit for Children Plan of Action, paragraph 37(6) ("Special emphasis must be placed on prenatal and post-natal care, essential obstetric care and care for newborns, particularly for those living in areas without access to services").

¹¹ Dr. R. L. Walley, FRCSC, FRCOG, MPH, Speech to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, March 13th, 2008 (available at <http://www.matercare.org/DrWalleyUSHouse.asp>).

¹² World Youth Alliance Declaration on Responsible Stewardship.

develop "green" ways of doing business are produced by human beings, the very objects of sustainable development.¹³

Conclusions on the global partnership for development

Person-centred development recognizes that human beings have inherent dignity or worth that is not dependent on a particular time, place or situation in society. The freedom proper to human dignity cannot be compromised for economic goals, no matter how laudable. Human beings are the objects of sustainable development and economic prosperity and all population and development policies must be oriented around this principle. We invite persons at all levels of society to use their creativity, skills and resources to create the necessary environment for authentic development.

¹³ Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, principle 1.